WORLD LIGHTHOUSE SOCIETY

Promoting, Preserving & Protecting the World's Lighthouses

1st Quarter 2011

Volume 9, Issue 1

Inside this issue:

False Point Lighthouse & the British Cemetery	4
The Lighthouses of Maine & Ourselves	5
Lighthouse Archives	8
Rare Lens Identified	9
Bell Rock 200th Anniversary Celebration Trip	17
The Light on Top —Part 9	19
Canadian Lighthouse News	23

FALSE POINT LIGHTHOUSE AND THE BRITISH CEMETARY

False Point Lighthouse is located on the east coast of India in the state of Orissa. Since 1837, the lighthouse has been guiding ships in the Bay of Bengal. The seaside village of Batighar in the Kendrapada district of Orissa operates this British keepsake at a time when modern maritime systems like GPS/SAT NAV are in use. Ships, trawlers and boats that navigate this route still rely on this archaic guiding beacon.

False Point Lighthouse in Batighar Gram Panchayat of Kendrapada District
Photo by Ashis Senapati

The Lighthouse Bill in India was passed on September 21, 1927 by the then British Governor General and the lighthouse department was constituted thereafter to control 32 lighthouses. When Independent India was formed in 1947, the number of lighthouses came down to 17, but the merging of erstwhile princely states to Independent India gave the control of 50 more lighthouses to the department. Incidentally Lighthouse Day is celebrated in India every year on September 21.

Today, the lighthouse department has under its jurisdiction 168 lighthouses, one lightship, 10 DGPS stations, 11 radio beacons, 29 Racons, and 6 Loran-C stations.

The False Point Lighthouse is situated on a large island created by the Mahanadi River delta. The British East India Company ships approaching Calcutta port used to mistake the Mahanadi for the Hoohly River. Therefore the point near the mouth of the Mahandi came to be known as False Point. It was essential to build a lighthouse there.

The Maharaja of Burdwan of Bengal donated the land required for the lighthouse to the British East India Company. Building materials such as boulders and lime were transported to the site by sea and finally the foundation work commenced on December 6, 1836. The 38 meter high tower was completed on October 16, 1837. It is a mammoth circular structure tapering at the top with the dome leading into the lantern room.

A contingent of about 25 men comprised of lightkeepers, sailboat crew, shikari [hunters, or trackers], watchman, lascars [Indian seamen], barbers and washermen lived at the station. Barrack accommodation was provided to all of them. Lighthouse expert Alan D. Stevenson, during his visit to the station in 1926, made a critical reference to the staff size and recommended reduction. However, toward the end of 2000, only three light keepers and two attendants were there.

The original settlers carved out a British colony in the area surrounding the lighthouse in the 1830s. They overcame many obstacles to clear hundreds of acres of untamed jungle to turn the surrounding land into one of India's oldest lighthouse stations in 1834. The workers also built a cemetery to bury the dead near the lighthouse compound. The Batighar cemetery represents a slice of history and is a symbol of the great sacrifices made by nineteenth century British men and officers who worked at the lighthouse in the dense mangrove forest and on ships near the harbour at Hukitola.

However, this beautiful cemetery of yester-year lies in ruin and decay. For decades, locals have been fighting a losing battle to save the final resting place of the original settlers of these seaside villages from total ruin. The condition of the British Cemetery is shocking. Thieves, vandals and the weather have conspired to destroy this cemetery. Now, nothing short of a major rescue initiative could possibly save the place.

The neglected British Cemetery
Photo by Ashis Senapati

The front portion of the cemetery, where graves date back to 1830, holds the oldest, most stately tombs and monuments. They were once surrounded by protective boundaries, but these are long gone. Some local people come here to enjoy the quiet natural beauty of the place, but the cemetery has also become notorious as a

hangout for drug dealers and loiterers.

Also, the inscriptions on most of the tombstones are illegible. The relentless pounding of rain through the long monsoon and the vagaries of nature have rendered almost all of the tombstones entirely illegible.

Some of the epitaphs inscribed on the tombstones [that can be read] are very touching. There's one about a young commissioner drowning after completing his inspection and another one about a child dying due to lack of medical aid. The tomb of Captain H. A. Harris, the conservator of Orissa port, who drowned on May 9, 1877, is one of the most famous tombs in the cemetery. The then Collector of Cuttack (Orissa), John Beames, in his autobiography, 'Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian', wrote in detail about this lighthouse and the cemetery on the coast of the Bay of Bengal and the numerous ships that anchored here in those days of brisk trade.

It is ironic that the people who have been doing their best to care for these graves are not the British, but locals residing in nearby areas and the employees of the lighthouse.

The tomb of Captain H.A. Harris, the Conservator of Orissa Ports, who died in 1877.
Photo by Ashis Senapati

Commodore B.K. Mohanti (India)
Indian Navy (Retired)

THE LIGHTHOUSES OF MAINE AND OURSELVES

As a photographer who visits Maine often to photograph the spectacular and historic lighthouses, I was excited to learn about the Open Lighthouse Day Event held at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse Park. Lighthouses, particularly in Maine, have so much meaning for people.

From the time of antiquity, lighthouses have captured people's imagination and awe. The Pharos lighthouse in Alexandria, Egypt, built in 290 BC, stood 400 feet tall, and lasted up until 1300 AD. Wow! You get a sense of the achievement of this structure when you consider that the tallest lighthouse in the U.S. today, Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, is 200 feet tall. Lighthouses have been the subjects of much art, including that of artists who loved Maine's rugged coast: Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, and Andrew Wyeth.

We all have been affected by stories of ships that have been saved because of a lighthouse and the heroic efforts of the light keepers and ordinary citizens who risked their lives to save people from maritime disasters. Just being next to one of these great and sometimes humble structures that border the coast of Maine gives you a thrill as you look out onto the waters and landscape beyond. Their history is rich in meaning. However there is a depth of meaning that I had no idea of until I learned from the education of Aesthetic Realism that what a lighthouse does is what we are all trying to do in our lives—put opposites together. "The world, art, and self explain each other; each is the aesthetic oneness of opposites." This principle, stated by the founder of Aesthetic Realism, Eli Siegel, I believe is an invaluable guide to seeing our relation to lighthouses with increasing wonder and meaning. Here are two examples.

1. Pemaquid Point Lighthouse or Pride & Humility

One of the first lighthouses that took my breath away was Pemaquid Point in New Harbor, Maine. As I first got a